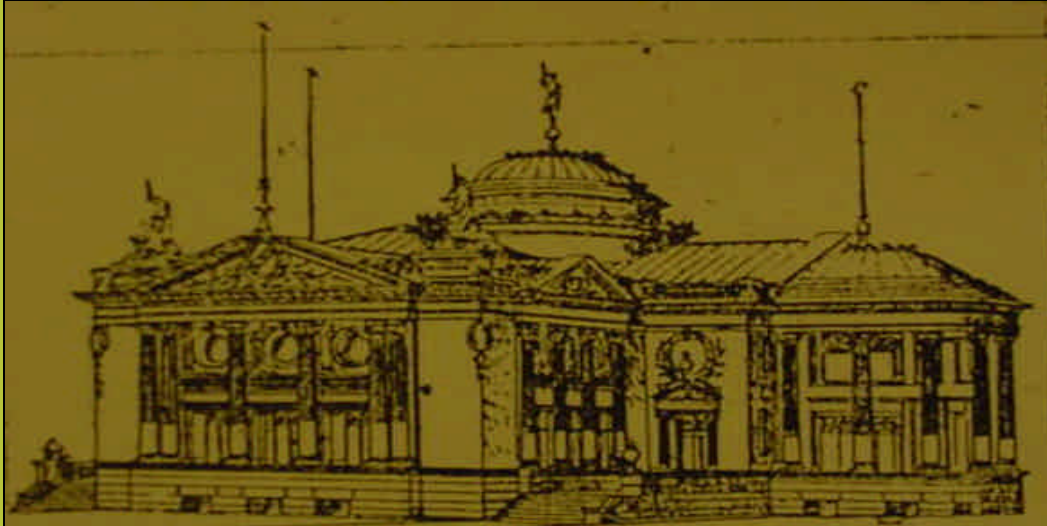


# SAN ANTONIO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Although books from private groups were available for “check out” prior to 1903, this historic context for San Antonio’s Original City Limits Survey theme of “Libraries” begins with the construction of the first public library in 1903. Since then, numerous buildings have been used as an extension of the library or housed “book stations”. In 2003, only three libraries are located within the survey area and were built prior to the 1980 survey “cut-off” date; Landa (1929), McCreless (1966) and San Pedro (1930), are still used as libraries.



Drawing of the Carnegie Library. San Antonio Express News 1929

Through a \$50,000 gift from steel magnate, Andrew Carnegie, and the donation of land from a local citizen, Mrs. Caroline Kampmann, San Antonio’s first free public library was opened June 15, 1903 at 210 W. Market Street. This was the second library in the nation given by Carnegie and therefore was known as the Carnegie Library. According to a letter from Mr. Carnegie to library advocate, Mrs. James L. Slayden, the City had to provide a suitable site, maintain the library free to the people, and have a minimum annual operating budget of \$5,000. Finally, the building had to be designed so it could be lighted on all sides.

In the beginning, patrons had to have an “obligation card” either signed on the back by a responsible guarantor or make a \$2.00 deposit as a guarantee for the safe return of checked out books. At this time, racial segregation was in place. A 1903 newspaper article reported the “colored people’s department” would open soon at the Riverside Colored High School at the corner of St Mary’s and Convent Streets.

By 1911, under the direction of the librarian, 30 book deposits located in public schools, community centers, churches, and a few businesses, were maintained by the library. “Deposits” often consisted of a box filled with books that were switched out on a scheduled basis. Staffed branches of the libraries were not established until 1925. Woodlawn Branch opened August 18, 1925, as a room within the [Woodlawn Ice Factory](#). Records indicate “The Negro Branch”, opened November 2, 1925 in a cottage adjacent to the Community House at 226 N. Hackberry Street. The following year, the Southside branch opened as a room within Brackenridge Senior High School.

A bond of \$500,000.00 was passed in 1927 to replace the Carnegie library and to build new branches. (A flood in 1921 compromised the structural foundation of the Carnegie library.) During construction of the new library, books and equipment were moved from the main library to the basement of the Municipal Auditorium. The Carnegie building was razed in 1929 and replaced by a “modern style” structure on the same lot. Designed by local architect, Herbert S. Green and made of Indiana limestone the new main library cost almost \$300,000.00.



210 Market Street, Main Library from 1930 to 1968. The Art Deco style, part of the “modern movement” in architecture is evident in the massing, a central tower with stepped wings, flat roof, decorative motifs of geometric design, reliefs and metal sash windows.

Effects of the Depression were felt as the library’s annual budget was reduced from \$96,000.00 to \$30,000.00 in the 1932 fiscal year. Eleven employees were dismissed while the remaining staff took a drastic cut in pay.



Woodlawn Recreation Center, 1103 Cincinnati, discontinued use as library when Westfall Branch Library was opened in 1965.

Three more “branches” were opened in 1937: Highland Park, Lockwood Park recreation building and the Latin American branch located at 502 Matamoras Street. Use of park facilities continued the pattern and library policy of “taking the books to the people”.



Sign above the Carver library entrance.

## [Carver Community Center](#) (Colored Branch of the San Antonio Library)

A 1929 Light Newspaper article announced the architectural firm of Souter and Simon won the contract for the new “Negro library” to be built at N Hackberry and N. Center Streets. The cost was estimated to be between \$50,000 to \$70,000 was being funded by the 1927 bond. In 1938, the library changed its name to the George Washington Carver Branch.

The building was designed to serve the recreational, intellectual and cultural needs of San Antonio’s East Side and of African-American personnel at San Antonio’s military bases. Construction for the library and auditorium, capable of holding 1100 to 1500 people, was started in 1929 and dedicated one year later. An African-American librarian, Mrs. Prudence Curry, was appointed by the mayor. Facilities were integrated in 1954 and interracial staff was assigned to all libraries in the city. When a new eastside library was built at 3350 E. Commerce the Carver was leased by a community-based social service organization. In 1986 a 12,000-square foot addition allowed for production facilities and a formal 650-seat theater.

**San Pedro Park Branch Library**, located at 1315 San Pedro Avenue in San Pedro Park, which opened on August 5, 1930, is still in use. Atlee Ayres, Robert Ayres, and J.M. Marriott are the listed architects with John Westerhoff as Contractor. Overall the building’s architectural style is Eclectic. The central door and evenly spaced openings reflect a Classical Style while the hooded door and windows are common Greek Revival elements. The applied quatrefoils above the windows are from the Spanish Revival style. Originally the building has a red tile roof, a new tile roof is being added in 2003.

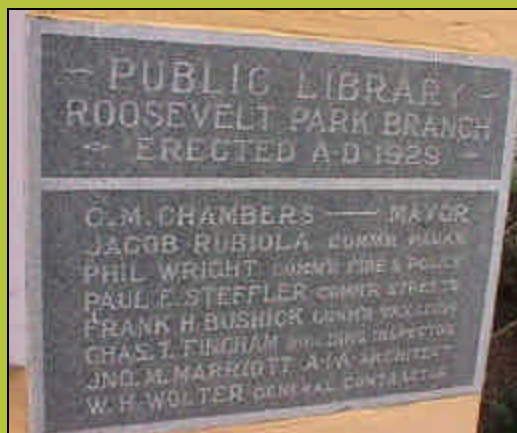
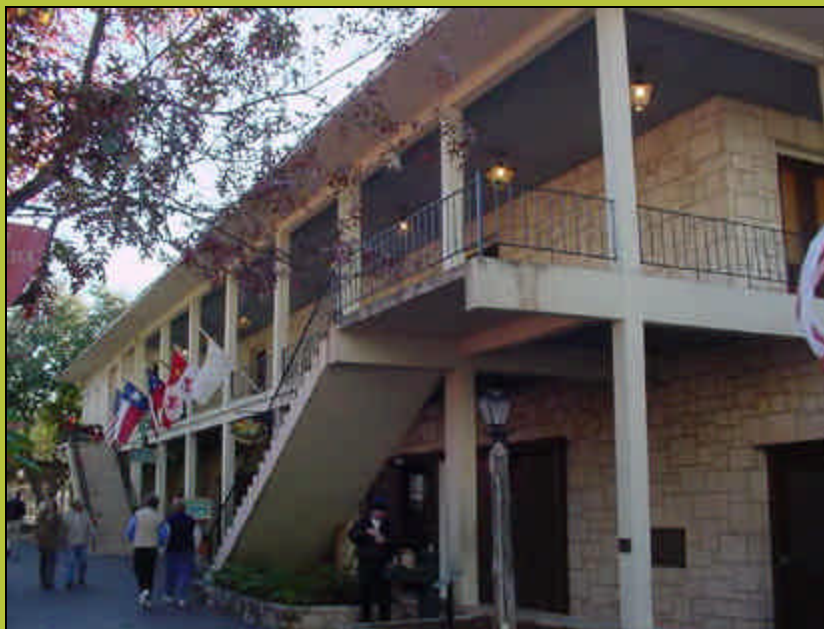


San Pedro Branch Library.



Bolivar Hall, once used as a library.  
Photo to the right is the north façade,  
below photo is south façade.

In 1939 the [Bolivar Library](#) located in La Villita was erected by a grant from Carnegie Corporation and housed the Main Library's Reference Department. Built of limestone in a rectangular plan, the two-story building has a second-story porch on the north façade and a shed roof addition on the west façade.



The 1940 Public Library Manual reported: "The Branches occupying their own buildings are: San Pedro Park Branch, erected at a cost of \$30,000; and [Roosevelt Branch](#) costing \$25,000. Prospect Hill Branch is located in the Prospect Hill Auditorium, Woodlawn Lake Branch in the Woodlawn Lake Recreation Center, and the George Washington Carver Branch (Colored) in the Colored Auditorium. The extension services of the system are now carried on through these original fine branches and a Latin-American Branch, located in the Latin-American section of the city; a smaller branch in West end for the colored readers: and two stations, one in Highland Park and the other in Lockwood Park; with additional extension points being established as demand grows."

#### Hannah Landa Memorial Library,

formerly the home of Mr. and Mrs. Landa, was built in 1929 and donated to the city in 1947. Still used as a library today, the library is located at 233 Bushnell in the Monte Vista neighborhood. Monte Vista is both a National Register and Local Historic District. The building was designed in the Spanish Colonial style, with a stucco façade, red tile roof, arched entryway and a courtyard.

#### Growing Pains

An analysis of the San Antonio library system and buildings was completed in 1952 by Ed A. Wight, Professor of Librarianship, University of California. The following information is provided from that report:

"While the main library has many disadvantages as far as the functional relationships of its public services areas. Planning for current and future development is particularly important at this time as San Antonio's population is growing rapidly....



Hannah Landa Memorial Library.

Only two of ten branches listed were adequate in terms of minimum standards for a modern branch library – San Pedro and Carver. Although the floor area of San Pedro is largest of all the branches, the division of space makes for an extremely crowded condition. The Carver Branch and auditorium, which share a building, have separate entrances and are separately operated. Because its main floor area is not broken up into small rooms and permits functional arrangement of furniture and equipment, Carver is the most suitable branch library building in the system. Roosevelt is a second building erected exclusively for use as a branch library. Originally located in a park, it has been separated from the park by a heavily-traveled highway. Because of its nearness to the Main Library, and the relatively small number of residents who have easy access to the branch, it is not suitable for expansion to meet branch standards. Most of the space in the building is occupied by the Bexar County Library, where the book stock and staff for two bookmobiles are housed.

If San Antonio were now starting from the beginning to develop a modern branch library program, with ample funds available for capital outlay and for current operating expenses, it would undoubtedly not follow the present pattern of numerous small branches, many located where space happened to be available in housing projects and recreation buildings. ...When the program of new branches, recommended in the next section of this report, is completed, the effectiveness of the small branches, especially the smaller ones within one-half mile of another, should be reexamined."

A note typed on the front of the report states "On October 9, 1952, the Board of Trustees gratefully accepted for record Dr. Wight's report. Since the greater portion of the Survey concerns development dependent upon availability of funds later on, the only action taken concerned the recommendation of the .....rearrangement of service and work areas within the main Building."

Almost a decade later in 1961, a bond was introduced to close obsolete branches and replace them with two roving 36-foot trailers. A newspaper article at the same time listed the following as "branches": San Pedro Creek, George Washington Carver, and Landa. Seven small "stations" were also listed: Roosevelt, Prospect Hill, Woodlawn, Lincoln, Alazan, Wheatley, and Harlandale.

McCreless twin brothers, G. Sealie and Sollie E., donated land for the **McCreless Branch Library**. Built in 1966, the 5,800 square feet building cost \$98,000. The renovation in 1995 brought the square footage to 12,000 at a cost of \$1,169,080. The original portion appears to have been a plain box with exposed concrete frame, see left portion of photo. A metal and glass barrel vault was added to the front facade adding vertical interior space and light. Brick horizontal banding differentiates the new from the old structure.

A 1964 bond proposal of \$1,755,000 called for a new 90,000 square-foot main library and the purchase of four sites to be used as branch libraries. The bond passed. Bid proposals for a Southside branch was requested a year later, bringing the total number of branches in operation to eight. The only other Southside branch at this time was Roosevelt. Woodlawn Lake Branch, which started as a book drop location, was closed in 1965 when the Westfall Branch opened.



McCreless Branch library. The 1966 portion is shown to the left of the entrance.



The “main” library moved from 210 Market to 203 S St. Mary’s Street in 1968. Only the [Hertzberg Circus](#) collection was kept at the old main library (Market Street) location.

A 1971 San Antonio Light article reported that the library board’s recommendations for closure of the San Pedro and Carver branches was given, approved, and passed on to City Council. Construction for eight new branches was planned, with one carrying the Carver Branch Library name to its new location. The new Carver Branch was built in 1973 at 3350 E. Commerce at a cost of \$215,000. Other branches would be initiated as soon as requisite population levels of 30,000 in immediate vicinities were reached. In addition to a new Carver Library, \$400,000 in bonds sold early that year would be used to expand Westfall Library, which was built in 1965, from 5,500 sq ft to nearly 10,000 sq ft, and to add more parking spaces.

Not until 1952, when a new city charter created a council-manager form of government, was the library given a budget line paid for by San Antonio’s general revenue funds. A 1979 newspaper article reported that out of ten major libraries studied in the United States, San Antonio’s public library had the lowest per capita funding rate. The article went on to quote *SA Magazine* as declaring the library “the worst public library of any major American City.”

In an attempt to rectify this situation, library leadership started aggressively collecting fines and automating its circulation system to control book theft. Community outreach involved issuing surveys and creating a commissioned master plan. It appears the poor publicity and decisive action of the library administration created a favorable environment as local citizens passed a \$28 million bond to build a new 240,000 square foot main library.

A design competition was held in 1991. Internationally known Mexican Architect, [Ricardo Legorreta](#), teamed with local architectural firms of Sprinkle Robie Architects, and John Dempsey & Associates, were awarded the contract. Interior designs were done by local architectural firm Ford, Powell and Carson, Inc. Construction began in 1993 and the new Central library opened to the public on May 20, 1995. Six stories high, the Central Library is more than twice the size of the old main library. Books and other materials went from a count of 450,000 to 750,000. The building at 203 St. Mary’s was vacated and remodeled. (known today, 2003, as the International Center).



The new library received great reviews from the Express News staff and the public. Prior to the grand opening the Express News claimed “exciting new library, awesome atrium, high-quality furnishings, high-tech equipment and world-class fixture and finishes”. Accolades continued after the grand opening stating the building was “a striking addition to the downtown skyline as well as to the city’s library system”. This was no “ordinary building” with an “array of odd angles and architectural quirks” with “most splendid series of spaces”.

Celebrating its Centennial in 2003, the library plans to install a monumental glass sculpture by world famous glass artist [Dale Chihuly](#) in the Central Library’s atrium. The sculpture was commissioned by the San Antonio Public Library Foundation.

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San Antonio Public Library Website. [www.sanantonio.gov/library](http://www.sanantonio.gov/library)

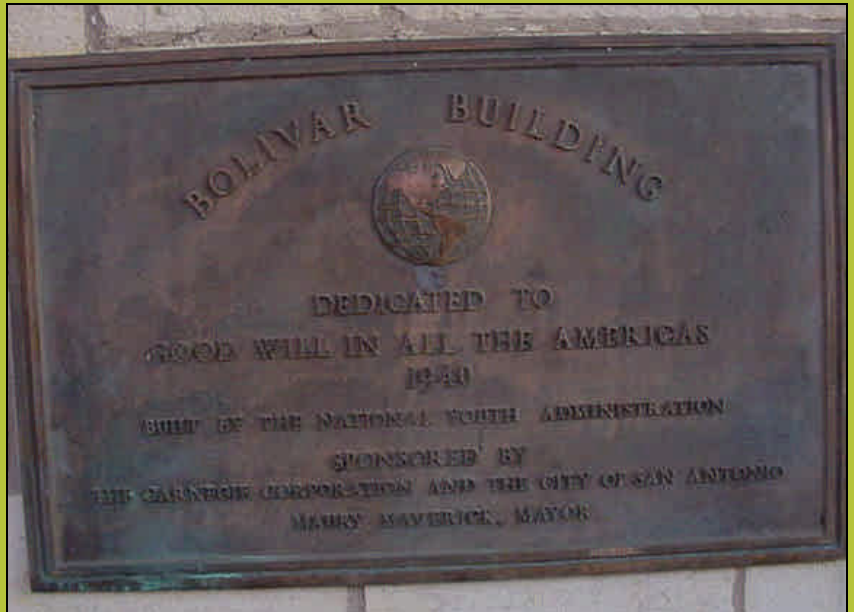
The Public Library, A Manual. Bulletin No. 6, Fall 1940, San Antonio, Texas.

Text by Cherise Bell  
Photos by CoSA staff: Cherise Bell, Brian Chandler, and Catherine Tinnemeyer





Historically known as Woodlawn Ice Factory, located at 935 Fredericksburg Road, historic address 931 Fredericksburg Road. The building has undergone multiple alterations and ownership.



Sign located on the Bolivar building.



The Carver Center. For more information see [www.thecarver.org](http://www.thecarver.org)



Sign for the Hertzberg Museum. Etched above the entry is "Books are the Homes of the American People - Emerson". Various quotes are located on the facades of the building.



Roosevelt Library, located at 311 Roosevelt Avenue, is currently the office of the Firemen and Policemen's Pension Fund.



Prospect Hill Library, 2322 Buena Vista, currently used as WIC administration office. No longer used as a library, the old Prospect Hill library building still carries the

Ricardo Legorreta  
[www.e-architect.com/news/aiarchitect/jan00/](http://www.e-architect.com/news/aiarchitect/jan00/)

Dale Chihuly  
[www.chihuly.com](http://www.chihuly.com)